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HB Public Comment/ED

**Testimony**  
**Office of Commission of Higher Education Budget**

**By Steve Meloy, Executive Secretary**  
**Montana Board of Public Education**

Mr. Chairman, for the record my name is Steve Meloy and I am the Executive Secretary to the Board of Public Education. On behalf of the Board, I wish to offer support for any efforts for the Montana University System and the Commissioner Office whose end results will be a program that prepares more highly qualified Speech-Language Pathologists for the State of Montana.

The shortage can be illustrated by a real need of the Havre and Great Falls school districts which are collectively short 7 Speech-Language Pathologists. Complicating this shortage is the allowance by the Montana Board of Speech-Language Pathologists and Audiologists which allow the use of Para-professionals to deliver services; however, each Para-professional requires supervision by a licensed Speech-Language Pathologists. So in addition to finding licensed pathologists for direct delivery of service; licensed pathologists are necessary to cover supervision responsibilities. The Havre School District pays \$600.00 per day plus expenses for contracted services.

Additionally, in most cases Speech pathologist services are requirements of IEP's (Individualized Education Plans) under the Federal IDEA Special Education Laws. Failure to meet the license requirements, places school districts in a position for possible litigation or loss of federal funding.

Finally, if the state adopts full-time kindergarten requirement for speech language pathologists may need to be expanded.

As you recall in our testimony the other day, we stated as one of the Board's priority strategic plan goals is the recruitment and retention of a qualified workforce. Providing funds for the preparation of highly qualified Speech-Language Pathologists in our university system would most certainly lend to the Board's strategic plan goals.

Thank you.